Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MILDRED TAYLOR

Mildred Taylor was born in Jackson, Mississippi, but her family moved to Toledo, Ohio when she was just three months old. Taylor grew up in Toledo, though her family frequently visited relatives in Mississippi, which is where she developed an interest in and knowledge of the South. She attended the University of Toledo and spent two years in Ethiopia with the Peace Corps, teaching English and history. Taylor then attended the University of Colorado where she received a Master's degree in journalism and was active in the Black Student Alliance. In 1975, she published her first book, Song of the Trees, which began the Logan family saga that would continue in Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. Taylor now lives with her daughter in Colorado.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The story takes place in 1933, during the height of the Great Depression. Since the story occurs considerably before the Civil Rights Movement, rampant racial inequality is very much a reality, especially in the South. However, some things are starting to shift—more African Americans are receiving an education (like Mama in Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry) and working decent jobs. Although these changes provide hope, many white people feel threatened by this progress and turn to violence and aggression to control African Americans.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is preceded by Song of the Trees and followed by Let the Circle Be Unbroken, books that also follow the Logans in their Mississippi town during the Depression. The works of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, like Walker's, deal intricately with issues of racism, gender, and self-identity among black populations in the United States, but their writing is geared towards a more adult audience.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry
- **When Written:** 1976
- **Where Written:** Los Angeles
- **When Published:** 1976
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary/Social Realism
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Rural Mississippi during the Depression (early 1930s)
- **Climax:** R.W. and Melvin Simms trick T.J. into robbing Barnett Mercantile with them.
- **Antagonist:** Racism, Harlan Granger, the Wallaces, the Simms family
- **Point of View:** First person, Cassie's point of view

EXTRA CREDIT

Peace Corps. Mildred Taylor joined the Peace Corps in 1965 and taught English and history in Ethiopia for two years before returning to the States to get her Masters degree.

Storytelling Genes. Mildred Taylor says that her father is the one who taught her the importance of storytelling. He showed her that telling stories is a way to pass down family legacies and educate others about history. Taylor's characters are also often autobiographical—David and Stacey Logan are based on her grandfather and father.

PLOT SUMMARY

It is 1933 in a town in Mississippi. When the Logan children return to school after the summer, they hear from their oldest brother Stacey's friend, T.J., that some white men burned three black men for allegedly flirting with a white woman. This sets the tone for the book, as the children continue to deal with racial violence and injustice throughout the year.

After Papa hears about the burning, he returns unexpectedly from the railroad with a very large black man named Mr. Morrison, who stays with the Logans as an extra security measure while Papa's away working. Papa also warns the children to stay away from the Wallace store, since the Wallaces are the ones responsible for the burning.

Meanwhile, Papa and Mama organize a boycott of the Wallace store among the black community. The problem is that many of the sharecropping families don't have cash and can only buy groceries from the Wallace store because their landowners have credit there. Thankfully, a kind white lawyer, Mr. Jamison, agrees to provide credit for the families who have decided to have Papa shop for them in Vicksburg rather than patronize the Wallaces' store. Mr. Granger, a local landowner who keeps a number of black families working his land as sharecroppers and who wants to get back 400 acres of land his ancestors sold to the Logans, threatens to make the Logans lose their land if they don't stop the boycott. Papa ignores the threat.

Stacey stops being friends with T.J. after T.J. gets Mama fired from her teaching job by telling the Wallaces that she teaches material that isn't in the textbook. T.J. starts spending time with

R.W. and Melvin Simms, older white boys, instead. Several black families are forced to stop shopping in Vicksburg when Mr. Granger threatens to have the boycotters placed into chain gangs. On the way back from a trip to Vicksburg, the Wallaces attack Papa, Mr. Morrison, and Stacey. Papa's leg is badly injured. Mr. Morrison fights off the Wallaces, hurting two of them badly.

With his new injury, Papa can't go back to work on the railroad, and then the bank demands that they pay the mortgage on their land immediately. Uncle Hammer, Papa's brother who now lives in the north, manages to come up with the money to pay for it by selling his fancy car. He brings the money on the first day of the revival, an annual gathering of the black community. T.J. shows up at the revival as well, with R.W. and Melvin, who claim that they will help T.J. get the pearl-handled pistol he admires at the Barnett store in Strawberry. Stacey and the others continue to ignore T.J. and head into the church for service.

That night, Cassie hears T.J. tapping on the porch door in the middle of the night, and when she lets him in, he tells her and her brothers that he broke into the Barnett Mercantile with R.W. and Melvin to steal the gun. When Mr. Barnett came down to investigate the noises, R.W hit him with the flat side of an axe. Mr. Barnett's wife thought all three of the boys were black. Afterwards, T.J. threatened to tell the police, so the Simms boys beat him up and left him in the back of their truck. T.J. asks Stacey to help him get home, and all four Logan children help him return to the Avery house.

As soon as T.J. gets in, however, several white men appear and drag the Avery household outside, beating T.J. some more. They want to hang him immediately, and one of the Wallaces suggests that they hang Mr. Morrison and Papa too. Mr. Jamison tries to stop them, but he's unable to. Cassie and her younger brothers run home to tell Papa, while Stacey stays to see where the white men take T.J.

Papa listens to the story, and Mama begs him not to use his gun, since she's afraid he'll get killed too. Papa sees lightning flash and gets the idea to set the land on fire. The fire stops the hanging, as all of the men join together to stop the flames from spreading. T.J., however, remains in jail, and possibly awaits a death sentence for killing Mr. Barnett. Cassie lies in bed and cries for T.J. and for the land.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Cassie Logan – Cassie, who attends fourth grade at a black school in the South, narrates the story in first person. Through her eyes, the reader sees the injustices of racism firsthand. Cassie has a short temper and has trouble keeping her thoughts to herself, which sometimes gets her and her family into trouble.

Stacey Logan – Stacey is Cassie's older brother. He attends seventh grade, which puts him in the same class his mother teaches. Because his father is often away for work, Stacey feels that he must be the man of the house, which makes him resent Mr. Morrison's presence at first. By the end of the book, Stacey grows to have a better understanding of many of the harsh realities that come from racism.

Mama – Mama, whose name is Mary Logan, is a schoolteacher who believes that the status quo of racism shouldn't be accepted, so she teaches her students radical material about slavery—material that isn't included in the textbooks. She also works to support the boycott of the Wallaces store, balancing supporting the black community against exploitation and oppression while also being careful to protect her family.

Papa – Papa, whose name is David Logan, is usually away, working on the railroad to support his family and their land so that they can maintain their independence. He has a quiet yet authoritative presence. He is a driving force behind the boycott of the Wallaces store, which forces him to face considerable danger.

L.T. Morrison – Papa brings Mr. Morrison to live with the Logans while he's working on the railroad. Mr. Morrison offers protection because of his huge stature—he's tall and strong, but quiet and shy with the family, though he comes to regard them as his surrogate household. Mr. Morrison's mother was killed by "night men" when they decided to burn down his house.

Uncle Hammer – Papa's brother, Hammer Logan, works in Chicago and earns a very decent living with his job. He's able to afford a luxury car and dresses well. He has a short temper and reacts angrily to the injustices he sees when he visits his family in Mississippi, though his recklessness almost puts the family in danger.

T.J. Avery – T.J. is Stacey's friend, though none of the other Logan children like him very much. His family sharecrops on Granger land. T.J. causes trouble throughout the book, causing Mama to get fired from her teaching job. At the end of the novel, T.J nearly gets lynched for a crime he did not commit, but Papa at least temporarily saves him by sacrificing his own land.

The Wallaces – There are three Wallace brothers: Kaleb, Thurston, and Dewberry. They are violent, racist white people who own a local general store. Early on in the book, Papa warns his children to avoid the store and even organizes an informal boycott in the community. While not the only antagonists in the novel, they are the most straightforward and active. They are responsible for getting Mama fired from her teaching job, and threaten to kill Mr. Morrison after his brothers are injured in a fight with Papa and Mr. Morrison.

Charlie Simms – Charlie Simms is the father of the Simms children, and he's described as "a mean-looking man." He pushes Cassie off the sidewalk because she accidentally bumps

into his white daughter. Though his family has a similar economic situation as the Logans, he believes he and his family are superior because they are white.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Little Man – Little Man is the youngest of the Logan children. His real name is Clayton Chester Logan. He is meticulously neat and clean, and he's attending his first year of school.

Christopher-John Logan – Christopher-John, at seven years old, is probably the least daring of the Logan children. He's usually cheerful and doesn't quarrel as much as the others, though he often gets swept into their plans.

Big Ma – Big Ma, whose name is Caroline Logan, is the Logan children's grandmother. At sixty years old, she still works in the fields like a young woman.

Harlan Granger – Harlan Granger is a rich plantation owner who's eager to get back land from the Logan household, which his ancestors had sold years ago to Big Ma and her husband. He's greedy and malicious, constantly plotting ways to force the Logans to sell their land.

Jeremy Simms – Jeremy is a white boy who likes the Logan children and often walks with them to school, even though he's beaten at home for associating with them.

Claude Avery – Claude is T.J.'s brother. He's quieter than T.J. and often gets blamed for T.J.'s antics.

Mr. Avery – Claude and T.J.'s father, a sharecropper on Harlan Granger's land.

Lillian Jean Simms – Lillian Jean is Jeremy's older sister. Though no wealthier than the Logans, she (like the rest of the Simms other than Jeremy) sees herself as superior to them. She treats Cassie rudely.

Melvin and R.W. Simms – The older Simms brothers pretend to make friends with T.J. but use him to cause trouble and take the blame. They are responsible for the killing for which T.J. is almost lynched.

Mr. Jamison – Mr. Jamison is a white lawyer who's sympathetic to the plight of African American families in the South, and who backs the credit of the black sharecroppers to allow them to boycott the Wallaces' store.

Little Willie Wiggins – Little Willie Wiggins is one of Stacey's classmates in his seventh grade class. He's the one who informs the Logan children that T.J. is responsible for getting their mother fired from her teaching job.

Miss Crocker – Cassie's teacher at school, who believes that the black school children should be happy with what they get, regardless of its inferior or used quality.

Mr. Turner – A black sharecropper who takes part in the boycott until forced to give it up.

Mr. Lanier – A black sharecropper on Harlan Granger's land.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RACISM

From the blatant racism throughout the novel, it's clear that the Logans are confronting the challenges of living in a society dominated by whites. At school, for example, the black children only have books that have been deemed unfit for use by white children. At home, the family is constantly defending their land from the former white owners' attempts to take it back form them.

Although the Logans are victims of racial injustice, they also fight against it, setting up a boycott of the Wallace store. Mama and Papa's struggle to teach their children to resist injustice demonstrates that there is hope for change in the future.

LAND AS INDEPENDENCE

In a culture where the memory of slavery is still strong, land is a symbol of independence and autonomy. Big Mama, Mama, and Papa repeat the same refrain throughout the book: "We won't lose the land." The land represents the Logans' independence from the power structure around them, since by working their own plot of land the Logans are free, in both the sense that they have no master, can earn based on their own work, and can shop where they like. However, the Logans must still exercise their freedom carefully, since the society at large is still grossly unequal and biased against them.

For the Logans, the land is also intrinsically linked to family. Cassie says that it doesn't matter whose name the deed is in because it will always be "Logan land." Her despair at the novel's end comes from realizing that her family's ownership of the land is in danger—as is the independence and power it represents.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

The black community forms a group that allows black individuals to prop each other up in order to face the racism and injustice of the South. They form this community through storytelling and going to Church, and by organizing in specific instances to stand up for the community—like in the instance of Papa's boycott, for example.

For Cassie, there is nothing more important than family. For example, Cassie is shocked when Jeremy says that he doesn't like his older brothers because she believes that family takes

precedence over everything else. The characters who don't stick by their families—like T.J.—get into trouble and ultimately drag others down with them, while characters who think first of others—like Papa—strengthen the community around them. On the other hand, friendships are shown to be potentially dangerous things in the novel. The relationships between Stacey and Jeremy and Stacey and T.J., for example, work out badly (for different reasons), and Cassie doesn't have any close ties to anyone outside of her family. Only family is there every time, all the time.

INJUSTICE AND DIGNITY

Because they live in a wildly unjust society that's biased against black people, the Logans must create their own forms of justice while maintaining their self-respect, dignity, and protecting their own safety. This can be an extremely difficult balancing act, even when the slights are smaller ones, like being ignored in the grocery store—which causes Cassie to yell at the store manager and get her family kicked out—or larger injustices, like being tossed around and forced to apologize for accidentally bumping into someone. Cassie has to learn to hold her tongue even when her pride tells her to speak up because it's the only way for her to maintain some dignity in situations where she has no real power.

STORYTELLING AND LANGUAGE

In the author's note to *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Mildred Taylor writes that her father was a master storyteller. She says that from his storytelling, she "learned to respect the past, to respect my own heritage and myself." Storytelling plays a similar role for Cassie in the book. During Christmas, for example, several of the adults in the black community tell stories about their families. The stories are a way for Cassie to learn about her past and what she can be proud of—but some of them also reveal societal injustices that get Cassie thinking about all the ways that life isn't fair, especially for black people.

Storytelling is especially important for the black community because it isn't their history that's taught in schools. Instead, teachers are forced to teach extremely biased versions of the past. When there aren't written words to back up their past, they have to resort to oral history.

Language is often used as a weapon in the book. Characters use name-calling and derogatory language to put others down. Cassie also learns to hold her tongue during the course of the book, since her outbursts at the beginning only get the family into trouble. She learns that dignified silence, too, can be powerful.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

LAND

Land represents independence, family, and community in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. The land represents the Logans' independence from the power structure around them, since by working their own plot of land the Logans are free, in both the sense they have no master and can shop where they like. However, the Logans must still exercise their freedom carefully, since the society at large is still grossly unequal and biased against them. For the Logans, the land is also intrinsically linked to family. Cassie says that it doesn't matter whose name the deed is in because it will always be "Logan land." However, when Papa knows he might be able to save T.J.'s life by sacrificing the land, he does so, setting it on fire. In this case, he sacrifices the land to protect his community and family.

WEATHER

Weather, especially thunder, often plays a symbolic role in the book, drawing attention during important scenes and events. For example, it's raining heavily when the school bus forces the children to jump into a muddy gully—causing them to retaliate by digging a giant ditch for the bus during lunch. Mr. Morrison's voice is also described as sounding like thunder, which is linked to the song he sings, "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry," a song that expresses defiance in the face of racism and oppression. Rain and thunder are also present when the Wallaces attack Papa and Mr. Morrison, and again towards the final confrontation of the book.

MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

Cars and buses, like land, represent power and autonomy. Harlan Granger's car, for example, demonstrates that he has money. It also shows that he's in control of his own transportation, unlike black landowners such as Mama who have to walk. Similarly, white children get to ride the school bus to school, while black children have to walk, no matter how far they live. Racist white characters also react badly to the black people who drive throughout the book—first to the Berrys and then to Uncle Hammer, seeing a threat in black people who seem to be gaining in power and self-reliance.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Puffin

Books edition of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* published in 1991.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"Shoot," I mumbled finally, unable to restrain myself from further comment, "it ain't my fault you gotta be in Mama's class this year."

Related Characters: Cassie Logan (speaker), Stacey Logan, Mama

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

As the novel opens on an October morning in Mississippi, Cassie walks to her first day of school along with her brothers Stacey, Christopher-John, and Little Man (Clayton Chester). Stacey responds to Cassie's frustration with Little Man's fastidious ways with irritation of his own, and Cassie attributes Stacey's foul mood to the fact that he will be in his mother's schoolroom this year. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* thus begins with a relatively benign issue surrounding family and education: a son is embarrassed to be in his mother's classroom. Yet, as the narrative continues, the specific lessons which Mama teaches will engage with the broader social issues that circumscribe the novel, and far more difficult situations related to family, independence, and duty will arise.

Once our land had been Granger land too, but the Grangers had sold it during Reconstruction to a Yankee for tax money. In 1887, when the land was up for sell again, Grandpa had bought two hundred acres of it, and in 1918, after the first two hundred acres had been paid off, he had bought another two hundred...But there was a mortgage on the two hundred acres bought in 1918 and there were taxes on the full four hundred, and for the past three years there had not been enough money from the cotton to pay both and live on too.

Related Characters: Cassie Logan (speaker), Harlan Granger

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

While they walk on the dusty road, Cassie and her brothers are surrounded by woods and fields – the sort of land which is so precious to her family. It is significant that Cassie, at the age of nine, knows the particular years that her grandfather bought their land and is familiar with her family's current financial difficulties (the mortgage and the taxes); this underscores how the Logan land is important to the entire family, not just to the adults. The land is a source of freedom (for it gives the family financial independence) and constraint (because it unifies family members together, ensuring that they all work in pursuit of the same goal, even if they must travel as Cassie's father does).

I asked him once why he had to go away, why the land was so important. He took my hand and said in his quiet way: "Look out there, Cassie girl. All that belongs to you. You ain't never had to live on nobody's place but your own and long as I live and the family survives, you'll never have to. That's important. You may not understand that now, but one day you will. Then you'll see."

Related Characters: Cassie Logan, Papa (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

The novel is set in 1933, when share-cropping was a common practice and former slave families often did not own the land of they labored on. In this setting, it is unusual that the Logans own their own land, and it is difficult for them to maintain this ownership in the face of a hostile, greedy white populace. Yet, by devoting themselves to maintaining their land, they can exert an unusual amount of influence on their own lives, and can begin to break free from the social and cultural heritage of slavery. As an adult, Cassie's father recognizes this; he understands the implications of land ownership on his family's relationship to the past and future. Cassie cannot as deeply grasp this significance, but she remembers the strength of her father's conviction as he once alluded to it. This suggests how the beliefs tied to property, as well as the property itself, can be inherited through generations.

> Finally T.J. said, "Okay. See, them Berrys' burnin' wasn't no accident. Some white men took a match to 'em."

Related Characters: T.J. Avery (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

The four siblings' walk begins rather peacefully; the tensions between the children are only manifested in irritated words, never in physical conflict. Stacey's friend T.J., with his own younger sibling Claude, soon infringe on this familial conversation, however, when they appear in the road and join them. T.J. seems to relish his position as the source of information, as he tells the Logan children that white men burned the Berrys. The adults in the Logan family had not told their children about this horrific incident, so T.J. is responsible for inserting this anecdote, and introducing the broader themes about violence and racial prejudice into the narrative's opening.

> [Little Man] ran frantically along the road looking for a foothold and, finding one, hopped onto the bank, but not before the bus had sped past enveloping him in a scarlet haze while laughing white faces pressed against the bus windows.

Related Characters: Cassie Logan (speaker), Little Man

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

The novel opened with Cassie encouraging her brother to move more quickly, and Little Man refusing to do so, afraid that he might dirty his clothes on the first day of his first year of school. Little Man kept fastidiously moving slowly along the dusty and dirty road, attempting to keep his Sunday clothes clean -- until the white children's schoolbus foils all of his efforts, in the moment that it rushes by. This small, seemingly innocent incidence represents the core struggle of the novel: the structures which benefit white society prevent African Americans from maintaining their property. Yet, Little Man is still naive about this reality; he even asks his older sister why only white children have a schoolbus. This suggests that the effects of racism penetrate one's earliest days, although consciousness of these issues may only arise when one is older and able to articulate his or her losses of dignity.

> The Great Faith Elementary and Secondary School, one of the largest black schools in the county, was a dismal end to an hour's journey. Consisting of four weather-beaten wooden houses on stilts of brick, 320 students, seven teachers, a principal, a caretaker, and the caretaker's cow, which kept the wide crabgrass lawn sufficiently clipped in spring and summer, the school was located near three plantations, the largest and closest by far being the Granger plantation.

Related Characters: Cassie Logan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

After Cassie passes and details the appearance of the Jefferson Davis County School, the local school for white children, she illustrates her displeasure with her own Great Faith Elementary and Secondary School, a "dismal end to an hour's journey." She describes her school in direct comparison to the white children's school -- one lawn is "crabgrass" that is only "sufficiently clipped," while the other lawn has a "wide sports field"; one is a "long white wooden building looming," while another is merely "four weather-beaten wooden houses on stilts of brick." The nature of these descriptionssuggests Cassie's acute awareness that the circumstances of white and African American children should be directly compared; they are fundamentally unequal, and the extreme nature of this inequality is perhaps best represented by these stark differences, which Cassie describes but does not explain.

> "In the first place no one cares enough to come down here, and in the second place if anyone should come, maybe he could see all the things we need—current books for all of our subjects, not just somebody's old throwaways, desks, paper, blackboards, erasers, maps, chalk..."

Related Characters: Mama (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

After the first day of school ends, Cassie finds her mother discussing the state of the school's books with Cassie's teacher, Miss Crocker. Miss Crocker is willing to accept the pitiful condition of these books, which the school is only allowed to borrow from the county's superintendent office, but Mama is rightfully disturbed enough to glue together the pages of books meant for her classroom. When Miss Crocker protests that an employee of the superintendent could inflict punishment on Mama or the school in response to this, Mama laughs off this concern; no one comes from the county because "no one cares" about this school for black children. And that would be the least of this school's worries; it lacks "all the things" needed for a proper education -- "desks, paper, blackboards, erasers, maps, chalk..." This response, and this scene, demonstrates how Mama is unafraid of voicing the truth about the circumstances which she and her family face. She does not accept the situations which threaten to undermine her dignity.

Chapter 2 Quotes

"Did the other men get fired?"
"No, ma'am," answered Mr. Morrison. "They was white."

Related Characters: Mama, L.T. Morrison (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

Papa returns with Mr. Morrison, a black man who was fired from his job for fighting with other men. When Mama briefly questions Mr. Morrison, likely to quickly ascertain his character before granting him the ability to stay in her home as a hired helper, she asks him who was responsible for starting that fight. Mr. Morrison replies that the white men initiated the engagement. As the conversation continues Mr. Morrison also reveals that these men *weren't* fired--because they were white. Brief instances such as these reveal the ways that racism is implicit and assumed in this society. It creates unfair, yet undeniable, customs which adults acknowledge without words.

"These folks getting' so bad in here. Heard tell they lynched a boy a few days ago at Crosston."

"And ain't a thing gonna be done 'bout it," said Mr. Lanier. "That's what's so terrible! When Henrietta went to the sheriff and told him what she'd seed, he called her a liar and sent her on home. Now I hear tells that some of them men that done it been 'round braggin' 'bout it. Sayin' they'd do it again if some other uppity nigger get out of line."

Related Characters: Mr. Avery, Mr. Lanier (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

After Church services on Sunday, Cassie's community congregates in support of the Berry's family, and individuals discuss the horrific nature of recent events. For instance, Henrietta Toggins, who was with John Henry and the Beacon on the day they were burned, supposedly witnessed drunk and unstable white men threaten the Berrys earlier in the day. The police refused to believe her story, however, which makes the story of the Berrys' death even more tragic and unjust. Black individuals may be thus inappropriately accused of lying anddeprived of the dignity associated with speech. They do not only experience terrible crimes, but they can only discuss these occurrences among themselves, lest they be even further mistreated.

Papa sat very quietly while the Laniers and the Averys talked, studying them with serious eyes. Finally, he took the pipe from his mouth and made a statement that seemed to the boys and me to be totally disconnected with the conversation. "In this family, we don't shop at the Wallace store."

Related Characters: Cassie Logan, Papa (speaker), The Wallaces, Mr. Avery, Mr. Lanier

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

The Laniers and the Averys discuss how the police refused to believe Henrietta's testimony and, according to Mr. Lanier, "ain't a thing gonna be done 'bout it" or about the Berrys burning. In a seemingly disjointed but clearly serious response, Papa says that his family will avoid shopping at

the Wallace store. This statement does not make sense to his children -- Papa does not directly accuse the Wallaces of being culpable for burning the Berrys and instill fear in the children present -- but it indirectly implicates the Wallaces with murdering the Berrys. It also suggests that perhaps the community can indeed respond to recent events; by boycotting the Wallace's store, they can use their financial independence to make a clear statement against the Wallaces' crimes.

Chapter 3 Quotes

By the end of October the rain had come, falling heavily upon the six-inch layer of dust which had had its own way for more than two months. At first the rain had merely splotched the dust, which seemed to be rejoicing in its own resiliency...but eventually the dust was forced to surrender to the mastery of the rain and it churned into a fine red mud that oozed between our toes and slopped against our ankles as we marched miserably to and from school.

Related Characters: Cassie Logan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

For this aptly titled narrative, the circumstances of weather often symbolize social situations. The dust that clings to Little Man's shoes represents the customs and laws that restrict the black community's progress, and the rain that begins to pour as autumn continues represents the social difficulties that intensify as they develop over time. The everyday plight of the Logan schoolchildren directly stems from prejudice; they only struggle in these weather conditions because black schoolchildren cannot receive a bus and the white bus driver enjoys threatening to splash the children with rain and mud. Yet, it also symbolizes the more enduring and problematic challenges which racism presents to adults.

Knowing that the bus driver liked to entertain his passengers by sending us slipping along the road to the almost inaccessible forest banks washed to a smooth baldness...we consequently found ourselves comical objects to cruel eyes that gave no thought to our misery.

Related Characters: Cassie Logan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

The schoolbus filled with white children often veere dangerously close to the Logan children as it passee them on the road, forcing them to climb the slippery slopes along the edge of the road. The driver intentionally movee the bus this way every morning because the white schoolchildren delight in observing the Logan children struggle. The white children watch the Logans' struggles, but they do not truly *see* them. They did not attempt to truly consider how the Logan children are feeling; instead, they laugh. From their position of privilege, the white children do not need to understand the Logans' perspective; they have far greater mobility, in both the figurative as well as literal sense.

"Well, he don't and you don't," Big Ma said, getting up. "So ain't no use frettin' 'bout it. One day you'll have a plenty of clothes and maybe even a car of yo' own to ride 'round in, so don't you pay no mind to them ignorant white folks."

Related Characters: Big Ma (speaker), Cassie Logan, Stacey Logan

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

When Little Man returns from school one day, he complains to Big Ma about the soiled state of his clothes, and she exhibits her no-nonsense refusal to coddle her grandchildren, as well as her reliance on hope. She firmly but gently tells Little Man to "pay no mind" to the "ignorant" white individuals who dirty his clothes; she inspires him to instead look towards the future, telling him that "one day" he will have "plenty of clothes." Although Big Ma might not be able to have such hope for herself, she hopes that her grandchildren will have more than they all have now. They may even have additional freedoms that are more difficult to attain than possessions -- like the independence which a car symbolizes.

Chapter 4 Quotes

"See, fellows, there's a system to getting out of work," T.J. was expounding as I sat down. "Jus' don't be 'round when it's got to be done. Only thing is, you can't let your folks know that's what you're doin'."

Related Characters: T.J. Avery (speaker), Cassie Logan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

The Logan children sit around their home's fire, barely listening to T.J. as he lectures about the ways he manipulates and deceives his family members in order to avoid helping with their work and chores. The Logan children do not engage in such activity; in fact, Cassie has just been helping her mother and grandmother churn butter. T.J. serves as a foil to individual members of the Logan family, who collectively work together on the chores involved with maintaining their home and their land. T.J.'s lies are an example of everyday secrets and childish misbehavior, more mundane versions of the secrets surrounding the murders and whippings and tarrings in the local Mississippi community.

"Friends gotta trust each other, Stacey, 'cause ain't nothin' like a true friend." And with those words of wisdom he left the room, leaving us to wonder how he had managed to slink out of this one.

Related Characters: T.J. Avery (speaker), Stacey Logan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

After the Logan children find T.J. snooping in Mama's room, instead of looking for his cap as he claimed he would be, T.J. claims that he was not looking for the answers to an exam Mama is about to give her class. T.J.'s claim seems dubious; he was, earlier, asking Stacey to find these answer sheets in Mama's materials. Yet the Logan children do not confront T.J. about this incident. T.J. wanders away, after delivering these likely empty words about the importance of friends trusting each other. T.J.'s words, despite their sheen of sentiment, underscore the tenuous and dangerous nature of friendships in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Indeed, friends like T.J. are not to be believed at all.

"Sometimes a person's gotta fight," he said slowly. "But that store ain't the place to be doing it. From what I hear, folks like them Wallaces got no respect at all for colored folks and they just think it's funny when we fight each other. You mama knowed them Wallaces ain't good folks, that's why she don't want y'all down there, and y'all owe it to her and y'allselves to tell her. But I'm gonna leave it up to y'all to decide."

Related Characters: L.T. Morrison (speaker), Stacey Logan, Mama, The Wallaces

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

After Mr. Morrison catches the Logan children observing Stacey fight T.J. at the Wallace store, a place which Papa has forbidden, Mr. Morrison delivers a powerful lesson. He admits that combat can be necessary in confrontation, and in the face of particularly hostile or overpowering circumstances, "sometimes a person's gotta fight." In addition to this general teaching, though, he specifically disciplines the children for going to the Wallace store. Mr. Morrison does not merely support the previously established rule, but he also explains its purpose; the Wallaces are morally questionable and they openly disrespect black individuals.

Mr. Morrison also indirectly provides a foil to T.J.'s secrecy, when he explains that he will make the Logan children themselves tell Mama about their journey to the Wallace store. Through his actions, he advocates for honest language and forthcoming behavior, providing yet another way that the Logans can strive to differentiate themselves from secrecy, which so often co-exists alongside racial prejudices and violent acts.

"...Y'all got it better'n most the folks 'round here 'cause y'all gots your own place and y'all ain't gotta cowtail to a lot of this stuff. But you gotta understand it ain't easy for sharecroppin' folks to do what you askin'."

Related Characters: Mr. Turner (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

Mama visits the Turner household to encourage them to join in her boycott of the Wallace store, and instead shop at other locations such as Vicksburg. Mr. Turner claims that he sympathizes with her sentiments but is unable to join in the movement, because he can only buy items through credit, at the Wallace's store. Mr. Turner introduces a solemn notion into the novel: the Logans are only able to act based on their moral principles and aspirations because they are more financially secure than the share-cropping families which live nearby. This supports the ever-present concept that the Logans' land gives them unusual and extraordinary liberty, and also implies an unfortunate association between one's financial circumstance and one's ability to change the social systems at play in Mississippi.

Chapter 7 Quotes

"In quiet anger she glared at Stacey and admonished, "In this house we do not give away what loved ones give to us. Now go bring me that coat."

Related Characters: Mama (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

Mama asks Stacey to bring her his coat, so that she can let the sleeves up and fix it so it fits him better, but Stacey admits that he gave the coat to T.J. After Stacey stutters and gives various reasons why T.J. convinced him to give away his coat, Mama gets quite angry that Stacey willingly gave away such a possession and allowed himself to be so manipulated. She chides Stacey that her family members do not "give away what loved ones give to us" -- they do not place others (who are often only looking out for their own interests, as Uncle Hammer reminds everyone) in higher importance than their own family. Of course, the Logans participate in their surrounding community -- the boycott which they lead is meant to improve the lots of all black people living nearby -- but their primary responsibility is always to their own relatives, the more intimate community which will last over time.

"Then if you want something and it's a good thing and you got it in the right way, you better hang on to it and don't let nobody talk you out of it. You care what a lot of useless people say 'bout you you'll never get anywhere, 'cause there's a lotta folks don't want you to make it. You understand what I'm telling you?"

Related Characters: Uncle Hammer (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

As Uncle Hammer lectures Stacey about Stacey's mistake of letting T.J. coerce him into handing over his fine coat, Hammer uses the case of the two schoolchildren to impart a larger lesson. T.J. may be a child, but he is like many adults in their community who are self-centered and constantly taking from the other families and individuals around them. Hammer reminds all of the children present that they should maintain good morals, only acquiring property in honest ways because of hard work, and not allow others with looser morals to take away the benefits of their success. Hammer alludes to the unfortunate reality that many individuals do not wish others to succeed; indeed, this impulse is one of the biggest reasons for the racial inequality that affects the entire novel.

And in the fireplace itself, in a black pan set on a high wire rack, peanuts roasted over the hickory fire as the waning light of day swiftly deepened into a fine velvet night speckled with white forerunners of a coming snow, and the warm sound of husky voices and rising laughter mingled in tales of sorrow and happiness and days past but not forgotten.

Related Characters: Cassie Logan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

On Christmas evening, as the Logan family gathers, the reader is able to witness the reason that these characters are so devoted to taking care of their land; it is these intimate family moments, of telling shared stories in comfort and even prosperity, that make their work

worthwhile. The narrator's decadent description -- which slowly goes over the scene's rich collection of food and decorations, and the room's pleasant fireplace -- makes this scene an instance of rare abundance. The Logans seem to have enough. It is significant that this description ends by alluding to their narratives -- the "tales of sorrow and happiness and days past but not forgotten" -- this informal education unites the Logan family, and celebrates the history that is so often silenced in schools. Here, in these evening of bounty, they can be expressed and given primary importance.

"Far as I'm concerned, friendship between black and white don't mean that much 'cause it usually ain't on a equal basis. Right now you and Jeremy might get along fine, but in a few years he'll think of himself as a man but you'll probably still be a boy to him. And if he feels that way, he'll turn on you in a minute."

Related Characters: Papa (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

Just as T.J.'s manipulative ways prevent an authentic friendship between him and Stacey, Jeremy's unequal status as a white boy prevents a healthy friendship -- as Papa reminds Stacey on Christmas evening, after T.J.'s family has left the Logan house. With this observation, which will hopefully prevent his son from being disappointed or hurt by an unequal friendship, Papa reintroduces the broader social issues into the holiday celebration (after there seemed to be a reprieve, in which Stacey refused to be as influenced from T.J. as he was earlier in the novel). These general issues only resurfaced after other families became involved in the celebration, which provides further support for the concept of familial cohesion.

"You see that fig tree over yonder, Cassie? Them other trees all around…that oak and walnut, they're a lot bigger and they take up more room and give so much shade they almost overshadow that little ole fig. But that fig's got roots that run deep, and it belongs in that yard as much as that oak and walnut…It don't give up. It give up, it'll die. There's a lesson to be learned from that little tree, Cassie girl, 'cause we're like it. We keep doing what we gotta, and we don't give up. We can't."

Related Characters: Papa (speaker), Cassie Logan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Avery and Mr. Lanier visit and inform the Logans that they cannot participate in the boycott any longer, because they have been threatened with a chain gang. Stacey immediately explodes in anger about them acting "like a bunch of scared jackrabbits," but Papa strives to make his children understand that the Logans' relative financial stability is a gift that other families cannot enjoy. Yet, at the same time, the Logans are like a "fig tree" -- a type of tree which has rich Biblical symbolism. The Logans' symbolic tree may not be as tall and mighty as others (the oak and the walnut), but it is deeply rooted; the Logans may not be able to immediately change their social circumstances, as much as they wished to with the boycott, but they remain determined to improve the lot of black individuals in Mississippi and will keep striving despite this immediate setback. "We keep doing what we gotta," Papa says, like that "little tree."

Chapter 10 Quotes

Mr. Morrison lowered his eyes and looked around the room until his gaze rested on the boys and me. "I ain't ever had no children of my own. I think sometimes if I had, I'd've wanted a son and daughter just like you and Mr. Logan…and grandbabies like these babies of yours…"

Related Characters: L.T. Morrison (speaker), Cassie Logan, Stacey Logan, Little Man, Christopher-John Logan, L.T. Morrison

Related Themes:

Page Number: 226

Explanation and Analysis

Kaleb Wallace attempts to use his truck to block Mr. Morrison, as Morrison drives the wagon back to the Logans' house after helping the neighbor Mr. Wiggins sow seeds one day. After Morrison physically moves the Wallaces' truck and begins to depart, Wallace threatens to kills Morrison. Once Mama hears this story, she fears that Morrison will be killed because of his association with her family, and she seems about to ask him to leave them.

Desperately, Mr. Morrison asks to stay, and he even reveals that he always wanted children like the Logan children. This scene does not only emphasize Morrison's admirable strength and devotion to the Logan family; it also suggests that Morrison has stayed with the family for much of the narrative because he personally needs to. Even individuals without children of their own might be moved to focus their lives around familial sentiment and dedication; in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, these intimate bonds trump all else.

❝ Uncle Hammer put his arm around Papa. “What good’s a car? It can’t grow cotton. You can’t build a home on it. And you can’t raise four fine babies in it.”

Related Characters: Uncle Hammer (speaker), Papa

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 236

Explanation and Analysis

After Uncle Hammer sells his car to support the entire Logan family and help pay the mortgage on the land, he does not seem to begrudge his family for this loss of freedom. He puts his arm around his brother, in a show of familial love, and acknowledges that cars don't give financial stability ("it can't grow cotton"), don't add to a stable home ("you can't build a home on it"), and, lastly and most importantly, don't provide you with familial relationships ("you can't raise four fine babies in it"). Independence is not everything; people, and family, are. With this simple sentence, Uncle Hammer reinforces this novel's view about what is significant in life: maintaining financial well-being, being independent, and loving one's family members.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ What had happened to T.J. in the night I did not understand, but I knew that it would not pass. And I cried for those things which had happened in the night and would not pass.
I cried for T.J. For T.J. and the land.

Related Characters: Cassie Logan (speaker), T.J. Avery

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 276

Explanation and Analysis

These chilling last sentences of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* fittingly end with "the land," which simultaneously is the background setting of the novel and the fundamental feature which orders the characters' lives and the events of the narrative. As Cassie lies on her bed and the novel closes, she does not know what will happen to T.J., who awaits more word about his fate from his position in jail. T.J. -- the character who has advocated deception and secrecy throughout the narrative -- is now experiencing a terrible state of not knowing crucial information (whether he will live or die). This is a bitter sort of irony.

Yet, it is in a way unsurprising that Cassie does not know T.J.'s fate. One of the novel's themes is the tendency for children to be uninformed about the future, or to not fully comprehend the forces surrounding them. Children are by their nature ignorant of the social circumstances which constrain them. They are in this way temporarily saved from knowledge, from having to daily choose to ignore their own dignity or to fight for it, as they continue to fight for the land that is already theirs.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

It's 1933, and the Logans are walking to class on their first day of school. Cassie tries to get her younger brother Little Man to walk faster, but he doesn't want to stir up dust and get his clothes dirty. Little Man is somewhat excited by the prospect of school, since it's his first year, but the rest of the Logan children are less than thrilled. Stacey, Cassie's older brother, is especially grumpy about the fact that his mother will be the teacher in his seventh grade class.

Even though the Logan children argue with each other, it's clear that they're a tight-knit family. Cassie is making an effort to get her siblings to stay together, even when Little Man is lagging behind. That they don't have a bus to take them to school hints at some of the other injustices and difficulties to come.

A long time ago, Cassie's grandfather purchased 400 acres of land from Harlan Granger's family, which allows the Logan family to make some extra money from farming cotton. However, 200 acres of the land have been mortgaged, and they must pay taxes on the other 200 acres. As a result, Papa has left to work on the railroad; Cassie's grandma, Big Ma still has to work on the farm like a young woman; and the entire family pitches in so that they can afford the land—something that Papa emphasizes is very important and worth their sacrifices.

The land is important to Papa and to the other Logans because it represents their independence from the white landowners. As a result, they work as hard as they can to maintain their land, even when they have to make major sacrifices to do so. The land also represents family now because the entire family has taken on the burden of maintaining it.

The Logans meet up with Stacey's friend, T.J. Avery, and his brother, Claude Avery. T.J. tells Stacey to cheer up, hinting that Stacey might be able to get some of the test answers from his mom. Stacey gets mad, saying that T.J. doesn't know Mama, and T.J. changes the subject to a "burning" that occurred the previous night. He gets the attention of the Logan children, revealing—after much cajoling—that some white men almost burned a nearby family to death.

Stacey is indignant when T.J. brings up cheating because Stacey doesn't believe in disrespecting his mother like that. The burning incident is the first major instance of racial violence in the book, and establishes the risks the Logans are taking when they support the boycott and why they have to be careful about how they go about resisting white oppression.

The Logans—other than Stacey—don't like T.J. very much. He reveals that Cassie almost got him in trouble by telling his mother that he had gone to the dancing room in the Wallace store. He got out of it by blaming his brother, Claude, instead, and Claude took a beating for it. The Logans think this is a dirty stunt, but T.J. finds it funny.

The Logans find T.J.'s stunt distasteful because he allows his own brother to take the blame for him—something that the Logan children wouldn't do because they care for each other and believe that family ties are important and worth defending.

Stacey tells everyone to get off the road quickly, and everyone except for Little Man scrambles up the bank and into the forest. Little Man is reluctant to scramble up the bank and get his clothes dirty, but when the school bus drives by and raises the red dust, Little Man ends up getting dirtier than the rest of them. Little Man indignantly demands to know where their bus is, but Stacey tells him that the black kids don't get a bus.

Little Man is furious because the white bus driver didn't even try to slow down or avoid the kids. He doesn't understand why the white children get their own bus when he and his siblings have to walk an hour to school and back each day. Vehicles are one of the main ways in which whites and blacks are divided in the book—the ones who own cars are mostly white, and everyone else has to make do with wagons or walking.

A white boy named Jeremy approaches the group and greets Stacey shyly. There's a bit of an awkward silence, and the conversation reveals that school has been in session for a month already for the white kids. Jeremy walks with the Logan children every morning, even though he gets ridiculed and beaten for associating with them. Eventually, they split as Jeremy goes to the white school with his sister Lillian Jean, who regards the Logans with disdain.

The fact that the white kids have already been in school for a month demonstrates one way in which their education is prioritized over the black kids' education. Also, Jeremy's family beats him for spending time with the Logans because they're racist and don't believe that black and white people should be friends.

The Logans continue on to the black school, which starts later in the year and gets out earlier because the black children have to help their families by working in the cotton fields. A lot of the older kids drop out of school entirely in order to help their parents work the fields. Cassie observes the students around her, who are wearing their Sunday best, even though all their clothes are full of patches, since no one can afford new clothes.

Black children have to conquer more obstacles in order to even attend school. First, they have to walk because there are no buses for them, and then they have to organize their school year around cotton picking season. Finally, it's clear from Cassie's description that most of the black students are quite poor as well.

Cassie heads into the fourth grade classroom, which the fourth graders currently share with the first graders because the first grade teacher is held up in Jackson for a few days. Miss Crocker, the fourth grade teacher announces that this year, all the students will get books. This is big news, since most of the students have never handled a book before, other than the family Bible. The Logans are lucky, though, because Mama owns several books. Still, Cassie is excited at the prospect of getting her own book. However, once Miss Crocker reveals the books, Cassie sees that they're badly worn, and her excitement fades into disappointment.

The fact that Mama owns several books demonstrates the Logan family's emphasis on storytelling and language, as well as their somewhat higher socioeconomic status relative to other blacks in the novel. They believe that having a mastery of words is important. However, one of the injustices of the school system is that even when the black children receive books to learn from, they're already badly worn—the refuse deemed no longer fit for white students.

When it's Little Man's turn to take a book, he outrages the teacher by asking if he can get a cleaner copy. Miss Crocker accuses him of putting on airs, so Little Man takes his book and goes back to his seat. However, once he flips over the page and sees what's written inside, he throws his book down and begins stomping on it. Cassie flips open her own copy and sees that there's a record of who the book has been checked out to and what the condition of the book is. It turns out that the books are checked out to white children until the condition becomes "Very Poor," at which point they're given to black children, or "nigra" as it's written in Cassie's book.

Little Man's reaction to the book shows that the Logans raise their children to take pride in who they are—it's also the reason Cassie finds the term "nigra" offensive. Cassie also jumps to Little Man's defense because he's her younger brother and she wants to defend her family.

Cassie tries to explain to Miss Crocker that Little Man is upset because of the chart, but Miss Crocker remains unsympathetic. She just tells Cassie, "That's what you are" when Cassie tells her about the "nigra" written in her book. Cassie rejects her book too, and she and Little Man both get whipped.

Cassie chooses to be punished with her little brother because she wants to stand up for him and for her own identity. However, Miss Crocker's reaction to the term "nigra" just demonstrates how deeply the injustices have penetrated their society—even many of the black adults are upholding a structure that's biased against them.

Cassie tries to tell her mother about the incident when class lets out, but Miss Crocker gets there first, and Cassie overhears their conversation. Mama doesn't seem to be very upset at her children, however, which frustrates Miss Crocker. Mama then glues paper in the books to cover up the charts, telling Miss Crocker that maybe they shouldn't just accept the way things are. Miss Crocker, however, disapproves of Mama and thinks of her as a radical. Mama glues paper over the charts in all the books in her seventh grade class.

Mama has her own quietly dignified way of dealing with racial injustices. She glues over the offensive panels in the books, even though Miss Crocker warns her that she'll get in trouble for vandalizing school property. Though she doesn't say so, it's clear that Mama understands Cassie and Little Man's reaction to the books.

CHAPTER 2

Cassie and her brothers are helping the family pick cotton on the farm when she spots Papa returning home unexpectedly. The family is surprised but happy. It doesn't seem like anybody was expecting Papa, though Mama mentions that she sent Papa a letter recently. Papa has brought a giant man back with him—Mr. Morrison, who was fired from his last job for getting in a fight with white men (who were not fired, even though they started the fight). Mama tells him that they're glad to have him. Papa, it turns out, can only stay for a day before he has to return to the railroad. Cassie wonders why Papa brought Mr. Morrison to live with them, deliberating with her brothers. She thinks that it might have something to do with the burnings T.J. mentioned on the first day of school.

Although the white men started the fight with Mr. Morrison, Mr. Morrison was the only one who was fired, which is just one more example of racial injustice in this book. Additionally, Papa has brought Mr. Morrison to the Logan farm because he seems to think that Mr. Morrison can offer some protection to his family, and he is always looking for ways to protect his family, even when he's working on the railroad.

The next day at church, the children hear that one of the burn victims, John Henry Berry, has died from his injuries. Apparently he and his brother Beacon had been getting gas in the nearby town of Strawberry, when a couple of white men accused them of flirting with a white woman. The men chased down the two brothers, who stopped by their uncle's house because they were running out of gas. The white men dragged all three—John, Beacon, and their uncle—out and lit them on fire. When Henrietta Toggins, a black witness, tried to tell the sheriff what happened, he called her a liar, even though the white men have been bragging about what they did and saying that they'll do it to any "other uppity nigger" who gets out of line.

It's clear that the burning incident was motivated by racism. The fact that even the sheriff won't listen to Henrietta's version of events shows how deeply embedded these racist sentiments are. It seems likely that the entire community knows that the Wallaces are responsible for the burning, since they're bragging about it, but no one is willing to suggest that three white men should be punished for hurting three black men.

Papa makes a comment that sounds random to the children: "In this family, we don't shop at the Wallace store." He later tells his kids that he doesn't like the Wallaces, and their store is trouble. Papa says that if he finds out any of them have gone into the store, he'll give them a mean whipping. The kids readily agree not to go to the store.

Papa's quiet comment is actually a call to action: he's suggesting that the community could show their disapproval of the Wallaces by boycotting their store, just like the Logans are doing. It's his way of dealing with injustice even when the law isn't on their side.

CHAPTER 3

The weather becomes rainier, making the walk to school muddier and tougher for the black children. The white school bus driver, however, purposefully tries to splash the Logan children on their walk to school. Little Man is especially upset because he's so meticulous and clean, but Mama explains that the county doesn't provide much for its black students—most of the money supporting the black schools comes from black churches, and their church cannot afford a bus.

The white bus driver goes out of his way to splash the black children, and it isn't until Little Man asks Mama directly about the bus situation that she explains why only the white children have a bus. This is just one instance where one of the Logan children has to learn about societal inequality amongst whites and blacks.

One particularly rainy, miserable day, the children are walking to school, and they think that they hear the bus behind them. They climb onto the bank, but it turns out it's just Harlan Granger's car going past—Stacey suggests waiting for the bus to pass as well, since they're already on the bank, and it will be difficult to get away farther up the road. T.J. convinces them that they should just keep walking so that they can get to school and get out of the rain. Once they start walking though, the school bus comes and narrowly misses hitting the Logans and T.J., who attempt to jump into the bank. However, they all miss and end up in the muddy gully instead. Stacey, furious, promises Little Man that this won't happen again, at least not for a long time.

The bus driver not only tries to splash the Logans, but he narrowly misses hitting them. Stacey and Little Man are so furious about this injustice that Stacey actually formulates his own plan to deal with the bus—it's his way of maintaining his dignity even though he's the target of social injustice. Appropriately, it's the miserable weather that causes the bus driver to drive the Logans into a muddy gully and makes Stacey formulate a plan—stormy and rainy weather often signals a turning point in this book.

Jeremy Simms sees the Logans coming and tries to greet them, but Stacey takes his anger out on him. Jeremy stammers that he likes the Logans, but they all ignore him. Cassie realizes that Jeremy never rides the bus either, no matter how bad the weather is.

It's hard for Jeremy and Stacey to be friends, no matter how hard Jeremy might try, because there are too many surrounding factors that force them apart—like society's racism in general. However, Cassie sees that Jeremy doesn't necessarily take advantage of his privilege when he recognizes that it's hurting others, and she respects that.

Stacey tells his siblings to meet him at the toolshed at noon, as he has a plan to make the bus stop splashing them. He doesn't include T.J. or Claude though, since he doesn't trust them to keep quiet. At lunchtime, the Logans grab shovels and buckets from the toolshed and head to the spot where the bus forced them off the road in the morning. They dig a huge ditch, making it look as though the rain washed away the road. After school, they run and hide near the ditch in order to see what happens. Sure enough, the bus gets stuck and the white kids have to walk to and from school for the next two weeks as the bus gets repairs done.

The Logans enact their own form of justice, allowing them to maintain some of their dignity in the face of blatant racist bullying. Revealingly, Stacey only includes his siblings in the plan. Even though T.J. is his friend, Stacey recognizes that he can only be entirely sure of his family.

At home, Mama tells Big Ma about the bus incident. She's glad no one was hurt, but she admits that she's glad it happened. The entire family begins to laugh. The Logan children continue to giggle throughout the evening, unable to hold in their laughter and triumph. Mama separates them so that they can complete their assignments for school.

Mama and Big Ma are happy about the bus incident because they know how unfair it had been for the bus to drive the Logan children out of the road. This is just one more example of how tightly knit the Logan family is, and how much they support each other.

Someone knocks on the door, and Mama answers it to see Joe Avery, looking very nervous. He warns them that "They's ridin' t'night." Mama and Big Ma look scared and send the children to bed, despite the children's protests. Cassie sneaks into the boys' room so that she can eavesdrop on the conversation with them. They hear that the "night men" are riding. One of the men Mr. Avery mentions is the white school's bus driver, which convinces Cassie that the night men are coming after the Logans. Stacey tells the rest of them that they can't ever tell anybody else about the bus incident.

One of the ways in which language goes wrong throughout the book is through eavesdropping. Cassie often overhears or eavesdrops on adult conversations, and sometimes she doesn't completely understand what's being discussed. In this instance, for example, she believes that the night men are after the Logans. The "night men" also likely refer to a group that's very similar to the Ku Klux Klan.

Cassie returns to her room and pretends to sleep as Big Ma enters the room. Big Ma starts searching for something under the bed, and Cassie hears Stacey ask Mama if he can help with whatever's the matter. Mama thanks Stacey but sends him back to bed. Big Ma soon joins Mama in the room outside, and she brings a rifle with her. Later, Big Ma returns and sits in the chair by the window. Cassie falls asleep and when she wakes again, Big Ma is gone. Cassie hears a noise on the porch and goes to investigate, but she falls off the porch. She sees a couple cars pull up onto their driveway, and she freezes, terrified. However, it looks as if they have the wrong house, and they pull out of the driveway again and leave. Cassie goes back to bed.

Big Ma and Mama stay up for a while in order to protect the family—Big Ma even takes out her rifle. Stacey also volunteers to help, and Cassie stays up because she's worried. The entire family cares about each other's wellbeing.

CHAPTER 4

Cassie is helping Big Ma churn butter one morning, and she overhears Big Ma and Mama discussing how Cassie hasn't been herself lately. They worry whether she might have seen the night men, but Big Ma says that it's not possible—she checked on Cassie right after the night men passed, and she had been sound asleep. As Cassie is standing on the stool to fetch the butter mold, she loses her balance and topples to the ground, breaking the mold. Mama tells Cassie to go inside and join the boys, and Cassie wonders guiltily whether Mama will ever find out about the bus incident.

Cassie still feels guilty about the bus accident, wondering whether her mother will ever find out, while Mama and Big Ma worry about the children. It's another demonstration of how concerned the Logans are about one another, and of the general racist atmosphere that makes such constant concern necessary.

Inside, T.J. is telling the boys about his strategy for getting out of doing chores for the family. The boys listen listlessly. T.J. tries to convince Stacey to steal answers from his mother for the upcoming test, but Stacey ignores him. T.J. then tries to convince the Logans to go with him to the Wallace store for some dancing, but Stacey refuses that as well. Finally, T.J. starts talking about the night men, and all the Logan children are riveted.

Unlike the Logan children, T.J. isn't at all concerned about helping out his family—in this book, that's a sign of bad character. It's also why Stacey refuses to help T.J. cheat on the upcoming exam. Storytelling also holds extra power among the black community because there's a lot of important news that can't be officially reported.

T.J. reveals that the night men tarred and feathered a black man, Mr. Sam Tatum, after Sam called Mr. Barnett, the owner of a convenience store, a liar. The Logan children are relieved that the night men weren't seeking revenge for the bus incident, though Little Man is especially disturbed by the concept of tarring and feathering. He says it would be impossible to get clean again. T.J. says he left his cap in the other room and leaves to retrieve it. When he doesn't return quickly, however, the Logan children wander into Mama's room and discover him snooping through Mama's things. T.J. denies that he was snooping for test questions though.

T.J. tells the Logans of yet another incident of racial violence—this time because a black man challenged the character and honesty of a white man. The children are alarmed by this news, but they're also relieved and no longer feel guilty about the bus incident. They no longer feel any pressure to confess.

Cassie and her younger brothers, Christopher-John and Little Man, take to Mr. Morrison immediately, asking Mama if they can visit Mr. Morrison in the shed out back where he lives. But Stacey remains aloof. It turns out that he thinks he can handle the family responsibility himself, without help.

Stacey has a hard time adjusting to Mr. Morrison's presence because he senses that it means he's not strong enough to protect his family, which he wants to do.

The next day, T.J. brags that he's made a cheat sheet for Mama's test. However, when Stacey sees the paper, he rips the answers in half. When school lets out for the day, Cassie and her brothers wait for Stacey and T.J. to come out of the classroom. Suddenly, T.J. runs out of the room and continues past the Logans without greeting them. Cassie asks one of the other boys where Stacey is, and it turns out that Stacey was whipped by Mama because he was caught with cheat notes. The notes belonged to T.J., but because Stacey wouldn't rat him out, he took the beating. Now T.J. has run into the Wallace store in order to avoid Stacey.

Stacey has a strict code of honor—he doesn't rat T.J. out even though it means that his mother has to whip him in front of the entire class. He also tries to prevent T.J. from cheating because he wants to keep T.J. from getting in trouble and he also doesn't want anyone to cheat on Mama's exam.

Stacey heads for the Wallace store, ignoring Papa's warnings. The other Logans follow. At the Wallace store, Stacey finds T.J., and they start to fight. However, before the fight gets very serious, Mr. Morrison appears and breaks it up. Cassie explains the situation to Mr. Morrison on the way home, and Mr. Morrison says that sometimes you have no choice but to fight—but he says that the Wallace store isn't the place to do it, since the Wallaces look down on colored people and just think it's funny when they fight each other. Mr. Morrison also says that he won't tell their mother—instead, he expects them to tell her themselves. Stacey agrees to do so, despite the protests of the other Logan children.

Stacey attempts to enact his own form of justice again, starting to beat T.J. up. However, when Mr. Morrison comes, he tells Stacey that he shouldn't fight around the Wallaces because they think it's funny when black people fight each other—in other words, Stacey is in a way betraying his own community by turning them into a laughingstock. Stacey seems to understand this, and as a result, he agrees to confess what he did to Mama.

As the Logan children and Mr. Morrison approach the house, Mr. Granger's Packard pulls out of the driveway. Big Ma says that Mr. Granger is trying to get some of the Logan land back again. Big Ma walks to the forest across the road, and Cassie follows her to a clearing where many of the trees were cut down by white men who wanted to buy them. Big Ma says she's glad Cassie's grandfather never had to see this, since he dearly loved those trees. Big Ma starts telling Cassie the story of how the Logans got their land. Even though Cassie knows the story, she encourages Big Ma to tell it, prompting her at different points throughout.

Although Cassie already knows the story that Big Ma's telling, she prompts Big Ma to go on anyway, since she knows that storytelling is an important family tradition. It's a way for their family history to be passed on and something that holds the family together. The land is also an important part of this family history because it allows the Logans to live independently and proudly, even in an unfair society.

Paul Edward, Big Ma's husband, made some money working as a carpenter in Vicksburg, where he met Big Ma. He bought 200 acres of land from Mr. Hollenbeck, who had bought most of the Granger land after Reconstruction. The Grangers had had to sell it because they had no money. Mr. Hollenbeck later offered to sell the land back for less than it was worth, but Filmore Granger, Harlan Granger's dad, wouldn't pay up, so Mr. Hollenbeck sold the land to various other buyers instead—including Paul Edward. Charles Jamison, the father of the Mr. Jamison Cassie knows, also bought some of the land. Mr. Jamison later sold another 200 acres to Paul Edward, even though he could have gotten more for it by selling it to Harlan Granger.

Land is inextricably entwined with the Logan family story. The fact that they own land distinguishes them from their black sharecropping neighbors who have to work for white landowners. The fact that Cassie and her brothers can say that they were born on their own land is also a tremendous accomplishment for the Logan family.

Big Ma also talks about having six children with Cassie's grandfather, but only two are still alive: Cassie's dad and her Uncle Hammer. Big Ma says that she'll never sell the land to Harlan Granger, no matter how much he bothers her.

Again, the family and the land are inextricably tied. As long as the family stays together, the Logans are determined to keep the land.

When Mama comes home, Stacey tells her about his fight with T.J. at the Wallace store. He doesn't mention the fact that T.J. had been the one cheating on the test or that the other Logan children had gone there with him, though Mama assumes that the other three went down to the store as well. Exasperated, she sends them all off to bed early, even though none of them really consider that a real punishment.

Stacey shows that he has developed his own honor code over the course of the chapter. He has a sense of personal duty now that convinces him to confess to Mama.

The following Saturday, Mama wakes the Logan children before dawn and tells them that they're going to visit a very sick man. She says that he doesn't look like other people, but the children must try to be themselves around him. They drive two hours out to visit Mr. Berry, one of the burn victims. He's so badly burnt that he can't speak and any kind of touch agonizes him. When the Logans leave the house again, Mama tells the children that the Wallaces are responsible for burning the Berrys—that's why she wants the kids to stay away from their store.

By showing the kids what happened to the Berrys, Mama is forcing them to understand how dangerous racism can be for them. It's why she doesn't allow them to associate with the Wallaces. It's the first time the Logan children have seen firsthand what some of the white men in their town are capable of. Mama also forces them to get this understanding now because she is about to embark on putting together the boycott, and she wants her children to recognize the dangers that could face them and the importance of being careful and smart.

On the drive home, Mama stops to see several other families. She talks about how the Wallace store is a bad influence and gets everyone to agree not to bring their children there. She doesn't directly mention that the Wallaces are responsible for burning the Berrys, since it seems dangerous to say so outright. Mama also tries to get some other families to shop elsewhere, but Mr. Turner, one of the men she speaks to, says that it's nearly impossible for the sharecropping families to shop anywhere else, since they don't have any cash, and the landowners sign for them to let them shop at the Wallaces on credit. The Logans are better off because they have their own land. Mama asks whether the Turners would consider shopping elsewhere if someone else backed their credit, and Mr. Turner says that he'd definitely consider it.

Mama tries to organize an informal boycott, and her actions predict some of the real tactics black communities used during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's—a movement that the author, Mildred Taylor, was actively involved in. It also becomes clear that the Logans are able to have a lot more freedom in terms of where they shop because they're landowners themselves—just one more reason the Logans are unwilling to let go of their land.

CHAPTER 5

One morning, Big Ma wakes Cassie before dawn and tells her that she and Stacey can accompany her to the market in Strawberry. Cassie's excited because it'll be her first time in town. However, once Cassie and Stacey find out that T.J. will be going too, it becomes clear that Big Ma only brought them so that they can occupy T.J. and he won't just talk Big Ma's ear off. The Averys asked Big Ma to bring T.J. to the market the night before, since they need him to bring back some groceries. Big Ma's clearly very grumpy about this, since she doesn't like T.J.

Although Big Ma clearly thinks that T.J. is a pain, she agrees to help out the Averys because they're part of the same community.

Cassie is disappointed when they arrive in Strawberry—the town is much more rundown than she imagined. Big Ma pulls their wagon into the back of a marketplace where they set up to sell eggs and milk. Cassie asks why they don't go towards the front of the marketplace, where other wagons are—she doesn't think they'll get much business at this location. But Big Ma just says that the wagons in the front belong to white people.

Cassie doesn't yet understand that society in general is biased against black people because of their skin color. As a result, she doesn't see the logic behind Big Ma's placement of their wagon, and she doesn't immediately see that everyone at the front of the marketplace is white. Racism is still new to her.

After they finish at the market, Big Ma stops by Mr. Jamison's office, and she instructs the children to wait for her while she finishes up some business. Cassie likes Mr. Jamison—he's the only white man who calls Mama and Big Ma "Missus," and his straightforward manner reminds Cassie of Papa.

Although society in general is unjust, there are still people who follow their own rules about human dignity. Mr. Jamison, a white lawyer, is one of them. He recognizes that things aren't fair the way they are, and he's sympathetic and respectful to the Logans.

T.J. suggests that they go to the country store now, but Stacey says that Big Ma wanted to go with them. T.J. insists that they'd be doing her a favor, since this way, they can order what they need and go home earlier. Besides, T.J. has something he wants to show Stacey. Stacey relents, and the children go on to the Barnett Mercantile, the country store. Inside, T.J. admires a pearl-handled gun. He says he'd sell his life for that gun. Stacey tells T.J. they should go get the things Mrs. Avery asked for, and T.J. hands Mr. Barnett the list. Mr. Barnett begins filling the list, but then he's interrupted by a white woman who has a list that's twice as long. This annoys Cassie, but Stacey tells her to be quiet.

It begins to become clear why Big Ma never agreed to bring Cassie into town before. Cassie's entire morning has been spent learning about the ways in which she's discriminated against. In this case, she sees that black customers are treated as second-class citizens, and it's still new enough to her that she gets very angry.

When Mr. Barnett is interrupted again by a white child who's no bigger than Cassie, however, she gets really angry. At first she tries to politely remind Mr. Barnett that they were there first, but when Mr. Barnett completely dismisses her, she loses her temper. Mr. Barnett kicks her out of the store with Stacey. Stacey goes to see what's keeping Big Ma at Mr. Jamison's, but Cassie wanders along the sidewalk trying to understand what just happened. As she's walking, she accidentally bumps into Lillian Jean Simms, who demands that Cassie apologize for running into her. Cassie apologizes, but it's not enough for Lillian Jean, who wants Cassie to get down into the road. When Cassie refuses, Lillian Jean's father, Charlie Simms grabs her and throws her down into the road. Cassie starts to run away, but then Big Ma appears and forces her to apologize.

Cassie gets an even worse lesson in racism—not only are black people treated as second-class citizens in shops, but there are those who feel the need to control and knock down black people as if they're sub-human. Even worse, Big Ma forces Cassie to apologize because Big Ma is afraid of escalating the situation. She doesn't want her granddaughter to get hurt, even is Cassie is right to be angry.

CHAPTER 6

At home, Stacey tells Cassie not to blame Big Ma for what happened. Stacey says that there are some things Cassie just doesn't understand, but Cassie is still indignant. Suddenly, they see Mr. Granger's car in their barn, and they run into the house to see what's going on. Inside, they see their Uncle Hammer, and he says that the car is actually his—he purchased a newer model of the same car Mr. Granger has.

Cassie doesn't understand why black people have to back down, so she's still angry with Big Ma. Stacey, however, has already learned that it's sometimes necessary to back down in the short term in order to survive, and he tries to explain this to Cassie.

Uncle Hammer asks Cassie about her first trip to Strawberry, but Big Ma tries to interrupt and keep Cassie from telling him about the incident with the Simms. Cassie forges on, however, and tells Uncle Hammer about Mr. Barnett and then the incident with Lillian Jean. Uncle Hammer seems amused that Cassie talked back to Mr. Barnett, but when he hears that Charlie Simms shoved Cassie into the road, he gets extremely angry. Big Ma and Mama try to stop him, but he's determined to confront Charlie Simms, and he says he has a gun. Mama sends Stacey to find Mr. Morrison. Just as Uncle Hammer starts the car, Mr. Morrison jumps into the passenger side, and they drive off.

Uncle Hammer reacts very strongly to racism because he feels that he's sacrificed too much for his country fighting in World War II for him or his family to be treated like second-class citizens. Big Ma doesn't take the same approach Uncle Hammer does, but she defies racism in her own way, by refusing to let Harlan Granger have the land. Both of them are passionate about protecting their family from injustice in their own ways.

Cassie says she hopes that Uncle Hammer will knock some sense into Mr. Simms, but Mama sends her off to bed early. Mama soon follows her into the room, however, and tells her that Big Ma just didn't want to see her get hurt and didn't like making Cassie apologize any more than Cassie liked it. Mama explains that some people think that white people are inherently better than black people, and Mr. Simms is one of those people. She says that no one on earth is actually better than anybody else though, no matter what their skin color is. Mama explains how slaves weren't regarded as people, and even though the Civil War ended slavery, some people still hold the view that black people aren't equal to whites. People like Mr. Simms believe this because it makes them feel important, and they have nothing else to hold onto.

Mama finally explains some of the day's events to Cassie, telling her directly that her skin color influences how people think of her and treat her. Mama also explains why Big Ma acted the way she did—it was also to protect Cassie and the rest of the family.

Cassie begins to understand why their skin color causes people to treat them differently. Mama says that true respect is freely given, however; just because Cassie is forced to call Lillian Jean "Miss" doesn't mean Cassie really respects her. Cassie worries what will happen if Mr. Morrison can't stop Uncle Hammer from going after Mr. Simms, but Mama just tells her that she's done enough growing up for one night and assures her that Mr. Morrison will stop Hammer.

Cassie now understands that there are situations where she will be forced to show respect to white people, but like Mama says, it won't be true respect if it isn't given freely. Knowing this allows the Logans to maintain their dignity even when they have to defer to white people around them.

The next morning, Mr. Morrison and Uncle Hammer are at the table eating breakfast and look like they haven't slept all night. Mama tells Cassie that Uncle Hammer will be driving everyone to church in his new car, and Cassie gets dressed up with Mama. Afterwards, while the kids are waiting for Uncle Hammer and Big Ma to get ready, Stacey informs the others that nothing happened with Mr. Simms—Mr. Morrison talked to Uncle Hammer all night and prevented him from confronting the Simms. Cassie is disappointed, but Stacey tells her she should be glad—he overheard Big Ma tell Mama that Uncle Hammer could have been killed if he had gone to the Simms.

Cassie still doesn't completely understand the severity of the situation, however, because she's disappointed that Hammer didn't confront Mr. Simms. Stacey, who's older and has seen more of the injustices in the world, tells her explicitly that someone could have died if Mr. Morrison hadn't talked to Hammer all night. The family is excited to drive in Hammer's car, also, because cars usually belong to white people in the book, and it's a luxury they're unaccustomed to.

Before the family heads out for church, Uncle Hammer notices the sad state of Stacey's coat, and he decides to give Stacey his Christmas present early. It turns out to be a new wool coat. It's a little big, but Mama says Stacey will grow into it. Stacey's very happy with the present, and they all head to church. When they get there, T.J. makes fun of Stacey's coat, saying he looks like a fat preacher. Cassie tells Stacey that T.J.'s just jealous, but Stacey still sulks about it later.

The entire Logan family is pleased with Stacey's new coat, which is the finest coat he's ever owned. T.J. is an expert at using language to hurt and manipulate others, however, withholding stories to hold his audience captive and insulting Stacey's new jacket.

After church, Uncle Hammer takes the family for a long ride in his car, driving to Strawberry and back. He pauses by the Wallace store and says he'd like to burn it down, but Big Ma and Mama hush him and tell him there are other ways to get back at the Wallaces. The Logans come across a narrow bridge on their ride back. Only one car can cross at a time, and normally, white families get to cross first. However, Uncle Hammer speeds along and goes over the bridge first. At first, the other family thinks that the car belongs to Mr. Granger, but when they see the Logans, they look shocked. The other family turns out to be the Wallaces. Mama tells Uncle Hammer he shouldn't have done that—the Logans will have to pay for it later.

Uncle Hammer wants to return racial violence with violence, threatening to burn the Wallace store. However, Big Ma and Mama know that that would only make things worse in a society where white men generally rule over everything. In a humorous scene, the Wallaces think that the Logans—who are in Uncle Hammer's car—are actually Mr. Granger, but even this funny scene has a dark undertone when Mama says that the Logans will have to pay for it eventually.

CHAPTER 7

Mama asks Stacey to bring her his coat so that she can take up the sleeves for him, but it turns out that Stacey gave the coat to T.J. to get him to stop making fun of him. Mama is furious and tells Stacey to get the coat back, but Uncle Hammer stops her. He says that if Stacey isn't smart enough to keep a good coat, then he doesn't deserve the coat. Then he goes on to tell Stacey that there will always be people in life who will try to drag Stacey down, and he has to learn not to let them. Meanwhile, T.J. has been bragging about his new coat all the time, and Cassie is sick of it. She decides to take revenge on T.J. and on Lillian Jean, who's been very smug every time Cassie has seen her lately, but she hasn't decided how to do it.

Mama is furious not only because the coat is an extremely fine coat, but also because it was a family gift. The Logans are a very close family, so they should treat each other gifts accordingly. However, Uncle Hammer doesn't allow Stacey to ask T.J. for the coat back because he believes there's a lesson to be learned there—it's his own form of justice. If Stacey gives away his coat, then he doesn't deserve the coat. Meanwhile, Cassie plans her own revenge against Lillian Jean and T.J., since she knows that no justice will be done unless she takes action herself.

On the day before Christmas, Cassie wakes up to find that Papa has returned for Christmas. In the evening, all the adults tell stories of their past. Some of these are funny, like the story about Papa and Uncle Hammer stealing watermelons from a neighbor, but Mr. Morrison tells a tragic one. He talks about the night his family was killed by night men because a white woman had accused one of their neighbors of molesting her. The night men came and burned down the house, and Mr. Morrison's mother saved Mr. Morrison by tossing him out of the house before he could be burned. Mr. Morrison's parents were "breeded stock"—slaves who were bred like animals to be strong. Although Mr. Morrison's parents fought the night men as hard as they could, they were still killed.

Storytelling is an important tradition to the Logans because it's how they pass on their family and community history, and their stories are different from the ones told in books at school or anywhere else in print. It's how Mr. Morrison, for example, remembers his family and how they were brutally murdered in a racist act. Mr. Morrison's explanation of breeded stock also demonstrates how white people treated black slaves as if they were cattle rather than humans.

Cassie has trouble sleeping after hearing this story, and she wakes up in the middle of the night. Big Ma isn't in bed next to her, though, so she gets up and walks into the other room where the adults are talking. Big Ma is saying that she doesn't want to mess with the white people here, since it could cause trouble, but Mama is indignant. Mama wants to take action against the Wallaces by organizing a boycott, but Papa and Big Ma agree that there's no way the Logans can back their credit with their land—it would surely result in the Logans losing the land. Uncle Hammer wants to burn the Wallaces out, but Mama dismisses him. Papa then notices Cassie standing in the shadows and takes her back to bed. He tells her that the Logans are never going to lose their land.

The Logan adults are trying to find a way to counter the injustices in their community in their own way. However, the only solution they can think of at the moment involves the possibility of losing their land, which Papa and Big Ma agree is not something they can or will ever allow. The land represents their family blood and independence.

On Christmas morning, the Logan children receive their presents. They each receive a new book, two of which were written by a black man, Alexander Dumas. The children also receive new clothes from Uncle Hammer, licorice, oranges, and bananas. They treasure the books above all else, however, and Little Man repeatedly washes his hands while flipping through his book to be sure he doesn't get it dirty.

The fact that the children treasure their new books above all else shows how much they value words. They know that language is an important tool, and it's likely why Papa chose a book written by a black man—he wants to show his children that there are powerful black role models as well.

The Averys join the Logans for Christmas dinner, and toward the end of the evening, Jeremy Simms knocks on the door. He's brought a bag of nuts for the family and a handmade wooden flute for Stacey. Stacey accepts it hesitantly. Papa tells Jeremy that he better go home before his dad starts looking for him, and Jeremy agrees and starts to leave. Cassie wishes him a merry Christmas before he goes, and Jeremy seems pleased. Afterwards, T.J. tells Stacey that he should get rid of the flute, but Stacey ignores him, remembering the incident with the coat. Later on, Papa tells Stacey that it's dangerous to be friends with a white boy, even if he would make a better friend than T.J. Stacey understands his meaning and agrees, but later Cassie sees him place the flute inside his box of treasured things.

Although Stacey recognizes that Jeremy could be a better friend than T.J., he listens to Papa's advice. Papa believes that even though Jeremy and Stacey get along now, racism is a much bigger issue, and it will eventually overshadow their friendship as boys. The situation here is unfair to both Stacey and Jeremy.

The next day, the Logan children receive a whipping for going to the Wallace store. Then the men go to Vicksburg on mysterious business—Mama won't tell Cassie why—and when they return, Mr. Jamison comes over. He brings a fruitcake and lemon drops for the children, and then the children are sent outside. Cassie sneaks inside once and sees that they're looking over some papers. She overhears Mr. Jamison say that once the papers are signed, the land will belong to Uncle Hammer and Papa instead of Big Ma, and anything that happens to the land now will have to be their joint decision. Afterwards, as Mr. Jamison's about to leave, the children head inside.

As in many other scenes throughout this book, the Logans are doing the best they can to ensure that their land remains with the family. In this case, Big Ma makes sure that even if she passes away, the land will be under Logan family name. It will be even more difficult for anything to happen to it because it will be jointly owned by Uncle Hammer and Papa.

Mr. Jamison pauses before he goes, however, and mentions that he's heard about some locals who want to shop in Vicksburg. It turns out that the men had gone into Vicksburg earlier in order to see if they could get credit to back thirty families who want to shop there. Mr. Jamison tells them that they will surely lose the land if they try to back the sharecropping families' credit with it, and he offers to back the credit instead. He knows that he will be unpopular for it, but he and his wife want to contribute to the boycott in some way. Mr. Jamison also warns the Logans that what they're doing is dangerous because they're suggesting that the Wallaces should be punished for what they've done. Harlan Granger will also use every opportunity he can to get their land.

Mr. Jamison hints that he's not the only white person in the community who finds the situation with the Wallaces unjust. He wants to help the Logans in whatever way he can, and he does so by preventing them from making a move that will lead to the Logans losing their land. Mr. Jamison is familiar with how important their land is to the Logans—after all, he's the one who sold some of his land to the Logans when he could have gotten more money for it from Harlan Granger.

Papa knows that they can't truly win against the white families, but he says that they must try, and that maybe his children will able to succeed where they can't. Mr. Jamison says he hopes that will be the case and leaves. Several days later, the men return to Vicksburg and come back with a wagon loaded with goods for families who are participating in the boycott.

One of the reasons Papa refuses to give up the land and his dignity is that he knows he's setting an example for his children. Even if he can't win right now, he hopes that his children might succeed in the future, when (hopefully) society starts to shift to become less racist.

The next day, Mr. Granger arrives at the house. The children all eavesdrop on the conversation from Mama and Papa's room. Mr. Granger urges them to stop the boycott, threatening that he can make them lose their land if they don't stop disturbing the peace. Papa says that they haven't lost their land yet, and they don't plan to start now. Mr. Granger says there are plenty of ways to stop them, and he gets up to leave.

Mr. Granger tries to bully the Logans out of participating in the boycott, implying subtle threats to their land. The threats are worrisome because without their land, the Logans would be able to help others participate in the boycott anyway, since they wouldn't be able to do their shopping in Vicksburg either.

CHAPTER 8

Cassie finds Lillian Jean on the walk to school and offers to carry her books for her. T.J. and the other Logan children don't understand what Cassie's doing, but when Little Man threatens to tell Mama, Stacey stops him. He says that whatever's going on is between Cassie and Lillian Jean and no one is going to tell anybody anything. T.J. tries to get Stacey to find out the answers to the next examination again, but Stacey tells him not to mention the test answers to him ever again.

Cassie is trying to find her own way of delivering justice in a highly skewed and unfair system. Although her other siblings take offense at the way she's kissing up to Lillian Jean, Stacey recognizes what Cassie's doing, and he encourages her to find her own way of maintaining dignity in a society that makes it very hard to do so.

One day after Uncle Hammer goes back North, Papa has a talk with Cassie in the forest. He explains that there are a lot of things she'll have to do in life in order to survive, even though she won't want to do them. Papa adds that her temper could get her into trouble. The only respect that matters, however, is the respect she has for herself. Papa then says that he'll trust Cassie to make the right decision about Lillian Jean—but adds that if she makes the wrong one, she could get the family into a lot of trouble. Cassie promises that Mr. Simms will never find out about how she'll handle things with Lillian Jean.

It's Cassie's dad's turn to talk to her about how racism works and how things aren't fair in life—echoing the talk Cassie's mom gave after the Strawberry incident. Cassie takes his words as a sort of validation for the secret revenge she's planning for Lillian Jean, since he's telling her to pick her fights carefully and strategically. If something goes wrong, it can affect the whole Logan family.

For the entire month, Cassie acts like Lillian Jean's slave, carrying her books and absorbing the gossip Lillian Jean tells her. Then one day, after exams, Cassie decides it's her chance to act. She goes to the crossroads to wait for Lillian Jean. T.J., meanwhile, has been caught cheating during the exams again, and Mama failed him. T.J. takes it out on the whole Logan family, saying that they think they're better than they are. He heads to the Wallace store. Cassie tells the other Logan children to go on, since she has to wait for Lillian Jean.

Cassie plots carefully about how to deal with Lillian Jean. This is very different from how Cassie dealt with her problems towards the beginning of her book. Instead of yelling insults or saying directly how she feels, Cassie has learned to keep quiet and plan revenge strategically, carefully, and on her own terms.

When Lillian Jean gets there, Cassie takes her books and tells her that she has a surprise for Lillian Jean in the woods. Lillian Jean is delighted and follows Cassie to a clearing in the forest, where Cassie then throws down Lillian Jean's books and stomps on them. Lillian Jean and Cassie fight, and Cassie makes sure not to make any marks on Lillian Jean's face. Cassie forces Lillian Jean to apologize and tells her that if Lillian Jean tells anyone about this fight, Cassie will reveal all the secrets and gossip Lillian Jean told her over the last month. Lillian Jean seems shocked by the encounter, saying that Cassie had been such a nice little girl.

Cassie finally takes her revenge on Lillian Jean, making her apologize for being racist and rude in the past. Cassie has managed to keep her own mouth shut, and meanwhile, she's learned how powerful words can be in the form of secrets and gossip. Using Lillian Jean's secrets as collateral, she manages to ensure that Lillian Jean won't tell anyone that Cassie beat her up.

The next day, one of the Wallace brothers, Kaleb Wallace, and Mr. Granger show up at school to talk to the principal. Cassie sees them arrive through the window and tells her teacher that she has to go the bathroom. Instead, she sneaks over to Mama's classroom, where she sees the white men observing Mama's lesson on slavery. Mr. Granger says that what Mama's teaching isn't in the textbook—and Mama retorts that what's in the textbook isn't all true. Mr. Granger has Mama fired from her teaching job, saying that she thinks she's smarter than the person who wrote the textbook. The children walk home with Mama after school that day, and Mama tells Papa, Mr. Morrison, and Big Ma what happened when they arrive.

This is yet another instance of injustice in the book. The teachers at the black school are forced to teach lessons about their own history that aren't true. When someone like Mama refuses to teach false material, she gets into trouble and loses her teaching position.

Mama says that the real reason she was fired was because of the boycott—and she doesn't know what they'll do, since they needed that money. Papa says they'll figure something out, and Mama nods and goes out to walk. Mr. Morrison offers to take a job, but Papa says that he'd rather Mr. Morrison stay around the house to keep an eye on things. Papa asks the children to be extra considerate around Mama for the next few days.

Mama knows that the real reason she was fired was because Harlan Granger is trying to stop the boycott, which causes him to lose money on the Wallace shop (he secures a portion of the profits from the shop himself). Papa and the rest of the family band together to support Mama through a difficult time.

Little Willie Wiggins, one of Stacey's classmates, tells the Logan children that T.J. was the one who told the Wallaces that Mama destroyed school property and taught things that weren't in the textbook. T.J. denies this, but none of the kids believe him, and when T.J. returns to school, all the other students shun him. When T.J. finally realizes that the Logans are no longer his friends, he gets angry and shouts that he didn't like them anyway—he has white friends who are better and who give him things.

Stacey finally realizes that T.J. isn't a good friend to have around, since T.J. crossed the line by hurting Mama and the Logan family.

CHAPTER 9

In March, the black school is about to finish up the year, while the white school continues until mid-May. Jeremy is sad about this, since he says he'll be lonely without them, and he doesn't much like his brothers and sister. Stacey finds it a little shocking that a person wouldn't like his own kin, but Cassie says she doesn't blame him—she doesn't like the other Simms either. Jeremy reveals that his older brothers have been hanging around T.J. and don't treat him very well, making fun of him behind his back.

Stacey's shocked when Jeremy says he doesn't like his siblings because Stacey has grown up in an environment where family is valued above all else. The fact that the black school ends so much earlier than the white school also demonstrates how the white students are given many more educational opportunities.

Cassie asks Mama later why the older Simms boys hang around T.J., and Mama says that it probably makes them feel better to make fun of him. Then Mr. Jamison arrives, but he says he wants to speak to Papa, who's working in the fields. Mr. Jamison walks over to talk to him, and Mama sends the children back to their chores. That night, when the adults are washing up for dinner, Cassie overhears Mama asking Papa what Mr. Jamison wanted. Papa pauses before he says that Mr. Jamison overheard one of the Wallaces saying about how he's going to put a stop to the boycott. Mama is scared of what might happen, but Papa tells her not to worry about it yet.

Papa remains with the family even though he's usually back at his railroad job by now. He's clearly worried about the situation and tension between blacks/whites in town. The relationship between T.J. and the older Simms boys is just one small reflection of society's larger injustices. Even though T.J. thinks that they're friends, the Simms boys treat him badly and make fun of him behind his back. T.J. is alone now, without a community, and it makes him easy to exploit.

After school lets out, Papa still hasn't gone back to the railroad. Cassie hopes that he won't go back at all, but on the following Sunday, Papa says that he'll have to—he hasn't returned yet because he's afraid something will happen with the boycott and the Wallaces, but the family needs his income. Two black sharecroppers on Mr. Granger's land, Mr. Lanier and Mr. Avery, arrive at the Logans' house during this conversation and say that they can no longer shop in Vicksburg. Mr. Granger has threatened to put them on a chain gang and is making them pay a higher percentage of their cotton yields. Papa says he understands. After the men leave, Stacey is indignant that the men pulled out of the boycott. Papa tells him that they had no choice—participating in the boycott in the first place was a huge risk. They aren't as fortunate as the Logans because they don't own land.

Mr. Granger has managed to threaten the sharecroppers on his land so that they can no longer participate in the boycott. Stacey becomes angry at the sharecroppers, but Papa reminds him again that the Logans are very fortunate to have their land—they have an independence and freedom that the black sharecroppers don't have. Papa's point is that the sharecroppers can't be condemned for giving in because the racism of society has made them so vulnerable and just want to protect their families.

Later in the night, Cassie eavesdrops on her parents and hears that Papa plans to go to Vicksburg the next day. Mama thinks he should wait a while for things to cool down a bit, but Papa refuses. He wants to bring Stacey with him so that Stacey can learn a bit about conducting business—he doesn't want Stacey to be a fool like T.J. Mama comments that T.J. is getting out of hand. One of these days, he's going to get into serious trouble. The next day, Papa visits the families involved in the boycott and finds out that only seven of them are still boycotting the Wallace store. Mama says that this isn't enough to affect the Wallace's bottom line, just enough to get them mad, but she can't change Papa's mind, and he goes to Vicksburg on Wednesday with Stacey and Mr. Morrison.

Although Mama warns Papa not to go to Vicksburg, he feels a responsibility to his community, so he insists on going as scheduled. Not only does Papa feel a responsibility to his community, but he also feels responsible for showing Stacey how to do business. Papa is motivated by both family and community to continue the boycott as planned.

On Thursday, when they're supposed to return, it begins to storm heavily. The men haven't returned as scheduled, and the entire family gets worried. Mama sends the children to bed, but Cassie gets up later and watches as Mama and Big Ma wait for the men. Mama wants to ride out and look for them, but then they hear a sound outside, and Mama runs out to meet the men. Mr. Morrison is carrying Papa in his arms, and he sends Stacey inside first. Mr. Morrison says that the wagon rolled over onto Papa's leg, but he doesn't look Mama in the eye when he says this.

Again, the weather acts up during a turning point in the plot. In this scene, the family is separated and worried about one another—nobody is able to truly relax, especially since the Logan men haven't returned as scheduled from their Vicksburg trip. When they finally do return, it turns out that Mama was right to be concerned earlier.

Later on, the children hear the story from Stacey: when they were returning from Vicksburg, someone had sabotaged their wagon and the wheels came off. While Mr. Morrison and Papa were trying to fix it, a truck drove up behind them. They didn't hear the truck because of the rain, and then someone shot Papa, and the bullet grazed his temple. The shot scared the horse, causing the wagon to roll over Papa's leg. Mr. Morrison fought the men, possibly injuring them badly.

Again, rain contributes to the chaos of the scene. The truck signifies that white people were following the Logan men, since only white people own motor vehicles in their community. All the acts of racial violence in the book have finally found their way to the Logans, with Papa almost getting killed.

CHAPTER 10

A little over a week later, Papa is finally sitting up out of bed for the first time. Cassie overhears her parents talking about the family's finances—they're going to have to stretch what they have as much as they can. It's too dangerous for Big Ma to go to the market in Strawberry. Mr. Morrison has been out looking for work every morning, even though Papa says that he won't find any. Papa is furious with the Wallace brothers and says he would like to take a bullwhip to all three of them, but Mama tells him that that would only get him killed.

The Logans are struggling to stay afloat even though society seems to be conspiring against them. No one will offer Mr. Morrison a job, and Big Ma can't go to the market because the family is afraid that there might be another act of racist violence.

Cassie hears Mr. Morrison coming up the drive and runs out to meet him. He says that he's heading over to help Mr. Wiggins sow some seeds, and Cassie asks if she can come along. Soon, all of the Logan children are riding on the wagon with Mr. Morrison. The work at the Wiggins' place doesn't take long, and soon, the Logans and Mr. Morrison are heading back home. However, they run into Kaleb Wallace, who uses his pickup truck to block the road. He threatens Mr. Morrison for what happened to his brothers. Mr. Morrison calmly asks Kaleb to move his truck and when Kaleb refuses, Mr. Morrison physically lifts the truck out of the way. As the wagon rides away, Kaleb recovers from his shock and yells after them, threatening to kill Mr. Morrison.

Kaleb Wallace uses his motor vehicle—a sign of his white authority—to block the road, but Mr. Morrison is able to muscle it out of the way. Kaleb continues to threaten Mr. Morrison and the Logans, however, and his threats also showcase how unfair society is. If a black man were to threaten the Wallaces in the same way, he would likely eventually be physically assaulted or killed, as the law looked the other way.

In August, the Logan kids escape to the woods after their chores are done to get away from the heat. Sometimes Jeremy Simms finds them and talks. He tells the Logans that some people in town are glad Papa's still hurt and can't work at the railroad. Cassie is furious. Jeremy reports that T.J. is still hanging out with his older brothers too, and they've been stealing things recently. Jeremy offers to take the Logans to see the tree house he built, but Stacey refuses. At first, Jeremy is hurt by his cold manner, but then he brightly offers to help the Logans build their own tree house if they ever want to.

Stacey remains cold to Jeremy after his talk with Papa, even though it seems a little unfair to them both. Jeremy continues to come by, however, and he tells the Logans about some of the racist sentiments that people in town have.

Mr. Morrison returns from Strawberry one day with a note that their mortgage is due immediately. Papa goes to Strawberry the next day and finds out that their credit is no longer good there, so he has to call Uncle Hammer to see if he can get the money. Hammer says he'll find a way to pay.

Harlan Granger is a powerful man in town, and he manages to convince the bank to demand immediate payment of the Logan mortgage. The Logans, desperate to keep their land, resort to telling Uncle Hammer, even though they're afraid he might do something drastic.

At the end of August, the annual revival brings the black community together for feasting and celebration. Uncle Hammer shows up on the first day, and Papa goes to greet him. It turns out that Uncle Hammer sold his car to get the money for the mortgage, which he's brought with him. He heads back North the next day.

Uncle Hammer seems to be at peace with his decision to sell his car to pay for the land, however. He hints that the land provides for the Logan family in a way that a car never could.

On the last day of the revival, a big storm starts brewing, but the Logans decide to attend the revival anyway. While they're there, T.J. shows up with the older Simms brothers. He tries to talk to his old friends, but everyone ignores him, and they head to service. Cassie looks back as she walks away, and she almost feels sorry for T.J. because he looks so alone. The Simms brothers tell T.J. he has to go with them to Strawberry now, since they accompanied him to the revival. They say they're going to get him the pearl-handled pistol he admired at Barnett's store.

The community continues to band together against T.J., especially since he shows up at the revival with two white boys from a racist family. T.J. has completely isolated himself from the community from which he would otherwise get support.

CHAPTER 11

Cassie is in bed, listening to Mr. Morrison singing a spiritual that begins with "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry." It's another hot night with a storm approaching. Suddenly, Cassie hears tapping on the porch. She sneaks past Big Ma and creeps to the door, where she listens some more and then opens the door to find T.J., badly injured. They go into the boys' room, and T.J. tells them that R.W. and Melvin beat him after he threated to tell what had happened. He asks Stacey to help him get home, but Stacey wants to hear what happened first.

The approaching storm signals that something major is going to happen in the plot. Mr. Morrison's song suggests a desire to at least be hear and recognized within the storm, which might be taken as a desire for the dignity of being recognized—by other men, or by God—even in the dreadful circumstances of entrenched racism. T.J.s friends weren't really his friends after all (as everyone but he knew). In this instance, Papa's words were true: the Simms brothers didn't really regard T.J. as an equal, so they had no trouble turning on him.

When T.J. and the Simms brothers went to Strawberry to get the pistol, the Barnett store was already closed. The Simms brothers said that they should go in and take it anyway, and that if they got caught, they'd just tell Mr. Barnett that they were planning to pay on Monday. T.J. climbed in through a small window and let the Simms brothers in. R.W. and Melvin were wearing stockings over their faces, and T.J. got scared then, but the Simms brothers wouldn't stop. Mr. Barnett and his wife, who lived above the store, woke up from the noise and came to investigate, but R.W. hit Mr. Barnett with the back of his axe, and Mr. Barnett falls down as if he's dead. His wife thought that all three of the robbers were black because of the stockings.

The Simms brothers are also fine with letting Mrs. Barnett believe that all three of the robbers were black. They're only concerned with protecting themselves, not with doing what's right or fair. And they know that the racism of their society will make it likely that any white person being robbed will just assume that the robbery is the work of black people.

Afterwards, T.J. asked to be taken home, but the Simms brothers refused. T.J. then threatened to tell on them, and that's when R.W. and Melvin beat him up, leaving him in the back of their truck. T.J. managed to get a ride from a farmer later on, and he ended up at the Logan house. T.J. swears that he's telling the truth, and the Logan children help him get home.

The Simms brothers weren't true friends to T.J.—they just used him because they felt he wasn't their equal. Meanwhile, the Logan children help T.J. even though he's been cruel to them in the past because he's still a part of their community, and they recognize that he's hurt.

As soon as T.J. slips into his bedroom window, however, several cars drive up. The cars belong to the Simms, the Wallaces, and several other white men. They accuse T.J. of being a murderer. R.W. and Melvin drag the Avery family outside and the Simms find the pearl-handled gun on T.J. The white men also demand to know where the other two black men are.

The older Simms brothers lead the hunt for T.J., even though they know that they're the ones responsible. Additionally, they try to pin their crimes on two other unsuspecting black men. The society they live in is so unfair that there's little doubt they'll get away with it.

Mr. Jamison drives up and asks the men to give T.J. to him and the sheriff, but the Wallaces threaten to hurt Jamison as well if he gets in their way. The crowd wants to hang T.J. then and there, but the sheriff says that Harlan Granger doesn't want anybody hanged on his land. The Wallaces respond that they'll do the hanging on the road, and they suggest that Papa and Mr. Morrison be hanged as well. Cassie, Christopher-John, and Little Man run to tell Papa while Stacey watches to see where the white men take T.J.

The Logans work together to protect their family and community—the younger kids go back to warn Papa, and Stacey stays to see where the men will take T.J. Meanwhile, the white men pay no heed to the law. They simply want to take their own revenge and hang T.J. without a trial. They don't particularly care what other black men they hang either.

CHAPTER 12

When Cassie and her brothers get home, the adults are already awake and furious to find the children missing. Before Papa can whip them though, Cassie starts crying and reveals the entire story, starting with the story T.J. told them. Papa decides he has to go get Stacey, and he grabs a gun, but Mama tries to stop him, saying it'll get him killed. Mama begs him not to use his gun, and Papa gives her a strange look as lightning flashes in the distance. He tells her that he'll do what he has to, and so will she. Then he and Mr. Morrison leave the house.

The Logans immediately spring to action when Cassie describes what's going on. Papa formulates a plan to protect Stacey and T.J., even though it might put himself in danger. That Papa ignores Mama's pleas to be careful suggests that there are times when being careful is no longer an option.

Soon, Big Ma, Mama, Cassie and her brothers smell fire. The land and the cotton are burning, and Big Ma and Mama assume that the lightning started the fire. Mama and Big Ma order the children to stay inside as they go out and try to fight the fire. When it's close to dawn, Jeremy Simms shows up to check on them. He says that everyone's fighting the fire still: the Simms, Mr. Granger, the Wallaces, Papa, Stacey, everyone. As Jeremy turns to leave, rain starts to fall, and the children cheer.

The entire community bands together to protect the land, which brings everyone together in the end. T.J.'s case is momentarily forgotten as white and black neighbors fight the fire for a common cause, and at least gives a glimpse of hope for some kind of way past racism in the future: a mutual need for and love of the land.

Cassie and Little Man go out to survey the damage at dawn, but Christopher-John refuses to go with them. They see white men and black men working side by side, trying to put out the fire to save the land. When the Logan women return home, Mama tells the children what happened. When the fire started, Mr. Granger stopped the Simms and the Wallaces from hanging T.J. and instead got everyone to fight the fire. Cassie is suspicious about where Papa was throughout all of this, and she worries that too much of their cotton was destroyed, and they won't be able to pay taxes. Mama assures her that they'll be able to pay.

At the same time, there is something illusory in this togetherness to save the land, as it seems likely that Papa has sacrificed his own land in order to save T.J., and it's possible that the Logans won't, despite Mama's assurances, have enough of their cotton crop left to support themselves and keep their land.

Before they go to bed, Cassie asks Stacey about what happened. Stacey says that Mr. Jamison tried to stop the Wallaces, but they pushed his car off the road They were about to take off with T.J. when the smoke started. Mr. Granger then ordered the men to hand T.J. over to Mr. Jamison, and everyone went to put out the fire. Papa and Mr. Morrison arrive home now, followed by Mr. Jamison. Mr. Jamison reports that Mr. Barnett has died from his injuries, and he tells Papa to lie low and not give anyone a reason to connect him with what happened—at this point, Cassie realizes that Papa was the one who started the fire.

Now it is clear that Papa made a major sacrifice for the community when he chose to set the land on fire to save T.J. The Logan family has worked throughout the book in order to keep their land, and now Papa has purposefully burned it in order to distract Harlan Granger.

Mr. Jamison leaves, and Papa tells Cassie and Stacey that T.J.'s in jail now, awaiting a severe punishment, possibly death. Stacey runs away at this news, heading into the forest. Cassie cries, but she goes to bed, thinking about everything that happened the night before. She cries for T.J., knowing that he'll never get to run free again like they will, and she cries for the land.

The novel does not end on a particularly hopeful note, as Cassie realizes that the land—and everything it symbolizes for the Logan family—has been damaged, and possibly for nothing. T.J. may still be executed, and justice still won't be served to the Simms boys.

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